



TO: Members of the House Commerce Committee

FROM: Andy Johnston, Vice President of Government & Corporate Affairs

DATE: December 3, 2014

RE: Support for HB 5804

The Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce supports amending the Elliot-Larsen Civil Rights Act to include sexual orientation and gender identity to the list of protected categories and urges support for House Bill 5804. We strongly believe it will contribute to Michigan's growth and competitiveness.

For over 125 years, the Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce has represented the West Michigan business community. We currently advocate on behalf of 2,700 businesses and a key concern for our members is the attraction and retention of talent.

As a member of the Michigan Competitive Workforce Coalition, we support updating the Elliott Larsen Civil Rights Act to include sexual orientation and gender identity. We have taken this position because a highly talented and diverse workforce is the key to moving our region and state forward.

Surveys indicate that attracting and retaining an educated workforce goes beyond competitive wages and benefits. More and more individuals seek communities that value diversity and inclusion. Making this amendment will support the recruitment and retention of talent, with both newcomers and local graduates.

Michigan's Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act of 1976 is an act to define civil rights; to prohibit discriminatory practices, policies, and customs in the exercise of those rights based upon religion, race, color, national origin, age, sex, height, weight, familial status, or marital status.

Michigan does not prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender orientation. The time has come to include them in the list of protected categories and prohibit discrimination on these grounds and send the message that we are truly open for business.

The Chamber recognizes the importance of inclusivity in our members' efforts to retain top talent and one of the Chamber's strategic goals is to build a magnetic and inclusive community. To this end, the Chamber supports amending the Elliot-Larsen Civil Rights Act and **we urge your support of House Bill 5804.**